

ROMANTIC SCIENCE: SCIENCE AND ROMANCE AS LITERARY MODES IN SIR
KENELM DIGBY'S *LOOSE FANTASIES* AND *TWO TREATISES*

A Thesis

by

MICHAEL STREETER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2009

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ABSTRACT

Romantic Science: Science and Romance as Literary Modes in Sir Kenelm Digby's

Loose Fantasies and *Two Treatises*. (May 2009)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Margaret Ezell

This thesis argues that 17th century polymath Sir Kenelm Digby treats his scientific discourses as psychological romances in his works *Loose Fantasies* and *Two Treatises*, with his use of courtly romantic tropes, and that a contemporary audience would have read Digby's scientific treatises as literary. I first argue that science and romance in Digby's narrative romance *Loose Fantasies* are literary modes of the text's narrative form and that these modes are not mutually exclusive, since science is a "psychodrama" to Digby, who is both the audience and author of these putative "private memoirs." I then relate Digby's "romantic science" in *Loose Fantasies* to his "poetike Idea of science" in Digby's *Two Treatises* in order to argue that while the treatise is traditionally received as a philosophical discourse, it is also a work of literary criticism. I conclude that Digby's "poetike Idea of science" is always unstable, because Digby cannot choose between the primacy of language and ideas in human cognition, due to the rapid rationalistic developments in epistemology during his time.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Despite cropping up in almost every corner of the 17th century, Sir Kenelm Digby has received little critical attention in his own right in early modern literature studies. Ernest Gilman, in his contribution to *Opening the Borders*, observes that while Digby “hardly stirs a glimmer of recognition today,” Digby “was no less celebrated than [William] Harvey” in his own time.¹ Digby was, as Diane Purkiss describes, an “oddball and Catholic...a bold, sexy pirate, a wide reader...an even wider knower, an experimenter and scientist...and one of the most handsome and seductive men of his time.”² Whether because of his patronage to such court figures as Ben Johnson or Anthony van Dyck, his battles at sea, his sensational marriage to Venetia Stanley, his copious library of medieval manuscripts, his poetry misattributed to John Donne, his paradoxical friendship with Oliver Cromwell, his sympathetic cure-all (a remedy that allegedly heals wounds remotely) or his co-founding of the Royal Society, Digby appears prolifically in 17th century literature as soon as you start looking for him. Curious, then, is the fact that the first book-length academic study of Digby’s life did not

This thesis follows the style of the journal *Isis: An International Review Devoted to the History of Science and Its Cultural Influences*.

¹ Ernest Gilman, “The Arts of Sympathy: Dr. Harvey, Sir Kenelm Digby, and the Arundel Circle,” *Opening the Borders: Inclusivity in Early Modern Studies, Essays in Honor of James V. Mirollo*, ed. Peter C. Herman, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999), 265

² Diane Purkiss, *The English Civil War: Papists, Gentlewomen, Soldiers, and Witchfinders in the Birth of Modern Britain*, (London: HarperPress, 2006), 351

occur until 1956³ and in the last ten years, only about nine substantial studies on Digby have appeared.⁴

The established trend of opening the canon, however, is allowing us to engage eclectic writers like Digby from a literary perspective. Now reaching the third decade of the movement, critics of the New Historicist and “Cultural Studies” camps seem to be revisiting form and genre. Dissenting academic R.V. Young’s critique of New Historicism is relevant to this shift, if polemical:

Now it is precisely for its high regard for literary quality that the New Criticism is currently disdained. As Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier editors of a collection of New Historicist essays, aver in their introduction, “New Criticism distinguished and privileged ‘literary’ language, the characteristic richness and ambiguity with which literature was seen to render it a far fitter object of study than other types of texts, such as descriptions of cities or political tracts.” Now we know better...In other words, the distinction between works of literature and what used to be called historical documents...is deprecated; whatever is written is a “text,” and all texts are equal...Perhaps the most revealing indicator of the situation is the number of college professors who seem to spend more time listening to hard rock and watching MTV than reading poetry.⁵

³ R. T. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby: The Ornament of England 1603-1665*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1956.

⁴ See A. Blank, “Composite Substance, Common Notions, and Kenelm Digby’s Theory of Animal Generation,” *Science in Context* 20.1 (2007): 1-20. Jackson I. Cope, “Sir Kenelm Digby’s Rewritings of His Life,” *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Jackson I. Cope, Derek Hirst, and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52-68. Gilman, 265-97. Roland Hall, “Unnoticed Words and Senses from Sir Kenelm Digby,” *Notes and Queries* 46.1 (1999): 21-22. Elizabeth Hedrick, “Romancing the Salve: Sir Kenelm Digby and the Powder of Sympathy,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 41.149 (2008): 161. Eve Keller, “Embryonic Individuals: The Rhetoric of Seventeenth-Century Embryology and the Construction of Early-Modern Identity,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.3 (2000): 321-48. Caleb Edward Mason, *Conciliatory Eclecticism and the Philosophy of Kenelm Digby*, (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001). David Sellers, “A Letter from William Gascoigne to Sir Kenelm Digby,” *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 37.4 (2006): 405. Roy Digby Thomas, *Digby: The Gunpowder Plotter’s Legacy*, (London: Janus, 2001). Samuel Glen Wong, “Constructing a Critical Subject in *Religio Medici*,” *SEL, 1500-1900*, 43.1 (2003), 117-36.

⁵ R.V. Young, *War against the Word* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 1999), 20.

One of the pitfalls of New Historicism has indeed been its levelling effect on texts—literature is not distinguishable from historical documents. The premises of New Historicism are not intrinsically evil, however, in spite of Young’s rhetoric. Put another way, Stephen Cohen, in his introduction to *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*⁶, argues that the “historicist literary criticism” of the 80s was never meant to exclude the formal characteristics that distinguish literature as literature in the first place:

In practice, of course, none of these critical methods was so absolute as to exclude entirely either form or history. But...the critical and institutional rhetorics...were marked by a self-perpetuating cycle of exaggerations, misrecognitions, and demonizations...When it began its rapid rise to prominence in the early 1980s, New Historicism seemed poised to break this cycle...Though pointedly rejecting a New Critical formalism...[Greenblatt] concluded with an assertion of the importance of formal analysis to a truly historicist literary criticism...Nearly 25 years later, this promise of a historical formalism has gone largely unfulfilled.⁷

“While (re)turning to matters of form,” this historical formalism—which scholars such as Dubrow, Strier and Jean Howard have themselves pioneered along with Cohen—“seeks not to set aside but to capitalize upon the theoretical and methodological gains of New Historicism.”⁸ In this historical formalist context, Digby’s scientific work is not only a “social” or “cultural” text but a literary one, too. Digby’s scientific discourse is valuable to us as literature scholars not just because it represents a voice of 17th century culture—indeed it does—but because the discourse participates in literary genres—in particular, the romance—and likewise does Digby’s literary romance/life writing *Loose Fantasies* participate in scientific discourse.

⁶ Appropriate is the irony that this revision to an “historicist literary criticism” would occur in a compilation of Shakespearean essays.

⁷ Stephen Cohen, Introduction, *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1-2.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

Yet the very terms of this overlap—science and literature—are variable. The word science literally means “knowledge,” but knowledge can take different forms. In our current generation, we tend to identify science with the natural sciences, at the expense of philosophy. We also associate science with falsifiable theories—claims which can be proven false with empirical evidence. Modern science also is less concerned with truth than with valid models; it is preoccupied with predictability, not veridicality. In the early modern period, science was not such a specific discipline. In the traditional sense, a science was a branch of knowledge in the universities, including theology, metaphysics and natural philosophy, with theology hailed as the “queen of the sciences”—though by the 19th century, mathematics would have usurped the title.⁹ New definitions of science were also competing with the traditional understanding. Sir Francis Bacon, in his *First Book of Aphorisms*, argues that “as the present sciences are useless for the discovery of effects, so the present system of logic is useless for the discovery of the sciences”; we worship “idols” that bias our thinking.¹⁰ Rather, Bacon proposes, we should practice an eliminative logical induction for a true science, not deduction and neither additive induction; we should liberate ourselves from tradition. Bacon’s notion of science reached for a *tabula rasa* state of mind; although, as Descartes, and later Kant, Heidegger, Gadamer, et al., have pointed out, Bacon’s theory of science could not escape tradition because of the ineluctability of tradition. Digby

⁹ Attributed to Carl Friedrich Gauss in Sartorius von Waltershausen’s *Gauss zum Gedächtniss*, (1856), 79.

¹⁰ Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum. Aphorisms Book I—On the Interpretation and the Nature and the Empire of Man*, ed. Joseph Devey (New York: P.F. Collier, 1902).

was familiar with this debate over science in his time, and his own position representative of this transition.

Likewise is the term literature unstable because it is not mutually exclusive with the social or historical. Although, as “New” New Critics like R.V. Young have observed, the creativity of literature is an expression of human free will and appeals to the universal human condition, this expression nonetheless works with conventions, which are socially constructed. Perhaps no better example is Milton, who reveals a contemporary urgency through his manipulation of genre—Milton will parody epic sublimity through his celestial re-enactment of the English Civil War in *Paradise Lost* and question the definition of tragedy through his self-conscious drama in *Samson Agonistes*. *Fin de siecle* critics, such as T.S. Eliot and G.K. Chesterton, have deprecated Milton precisely because he is so historically preoccupied, yet literary conventions are created in temporal moments by temporal agents. As Sidney says in his *Apology for Poesy*, “poesy” is an “art of imitating nature,” not nature herself, “to teach and delight”; it contains not just the universal (“precepts”) but also the particular (“examples”).¹¹ Because literature contains such a confluence of the timeless and the temporal (social), its conventions vary according to period. Thus, in 17th century England, certain genres, such as the novel, were still embryonic, while others, such as the epic, were reaching their climax; whereas now, the novel is an established genre, while the epic, an endangered, if not already extinct, genre (or perhaps now a mode).

¹¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, *Sir Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2001), 66, 84.

Digby's literary and scientific eclecticism is primarily a product of two socio-cultural conditions—Renaissance humanist theories of education and the expansion of audience due to printing. As Elizabeth Spiller elaborates, to the humanist, “knowledge cannot be simply given to readers but must in some way be produced by them.”¹² One thinks of Montaigne's criticism of scholastic rote memorization in his essay “On the Education of Children”—“The usual way is to bawl into a Pupil's ears as if one were pouring water into a funnel, and the boy's business is simply to repeat what he is told”—and even Socrates' description of dialectic as a kind of midwifery for “giving birth” to knowledge.¹³ Though ironically accused of stunting learning precisely because of his emphasis on repetition, the Renaissance humanist believed that the reader must be an active student of the text in order to “copiously invent” knowledge, as Milton would say.¹⁴ A reader of scientific texts in the 17th century, then, would have been expected to “invent” knowledge in much the same way he would “beget” knowledge when reading poetry; he would be active, not passive. Science is a kind of “journey” or psychodrama. As such, just as romance can be a literary genre (“the romance”) as well as a mode of narrative (“romantic”), so too can scientific discourse be a literary mode of narrative, not just a technical genre, in so far that scientific discourse is a psychodrama.

¹² Elizabeth Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

¹³ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford University Press, 1958), 54. Plato, “Theaetetus,” *Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman*, vol. 12 of *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans., Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 150b-151d.

¹⁴ John Milton, “Of Education,” *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1957).

Moreover, with the expansion of audience due to printing, Digby's scientific treatises are marketed not just to humanist friends at Court but also to a popular audience, and so writing in literary modes, such as the romance, is all the more imperative. As Juliett Cummins, David Burchell and others have argued, "the impact of natural philosophy on the early modern intellectual landscape depended on the effective use of rhetorical and even dramatic techniques to communicate and develop new ideas"¹⁵ Meetings at the Royal Society, which Digby himself co-founded, "often included grand dramatic spectacles designed to impress upon their viewers the gravity of the society's undertakings."¹⁶ At the risk of incurring Habermas' critique of instrumentalism, scientific writing in early modern England exploits literary forms to communicate to a lay or skeptical audience.

Digby's texts seem conscious of these two classes of audience—the humanist and the popular (or as Digby would say, "the vulgar"). Both communities of audience would have read Digby's scientific treatises as a *mythos*, not a dry discourse. Yet they would have appreciated Digby's science as romantic for different reasons. To the humanist, scientific treatises would be "romanced" because, as a psychodrama, the scientific discourse itself is a counterpart literary mode to the romance. To a more popular audience, scientific treatises would be "romanced" not because the discourse is a psychodrama but precisely because the narrative and performative contexts of the discourse overshadow the discourse itself. In other words, to a humanist audience,

¹⁵ Juliet Cummins and David Burchell, *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Digby's scientific texts are romantic, because science is integrated with romance; to a popular audience, Digby's scientific texts are romantic, because science is segregated from romance. Andrew Mousley, in his dissertation, *The Making of the Self: Life Writing in the English Renaissance*, has argued that "Digby's scientific and philosophical work constitutes itself in opposition to the 'tall tales' of romance and poetry at the same moment as it figures Digby in the role of an heroic adventurer'.¹⁷ Perhaps this tension is a reflection of the different understandings of "romantic science" to these two classes of audience.

My first chapter will argue that science and romance in Digby's narrative romance *Loose Fantasies* are literary modes of the text's narrative form and that these modes are not mutually exclusive, since science is a psychodrama to Digby, who is both the audience and author of these putative "private memoirs." Chapter II will discuss how Digby's *Two Treatises* is not only a philosophical discourse but also a work of literary criticism that figures metaphysical poetry in courtly romantic terms, as well as defends Digby's "poetike Idea of science." Chapter III will shift focus from literary criticism to textual studies/early modern print culture. I will argue that in the 1658 edition of Digby's publication *A Late Discourse*, a popular audience would have appreciated the "romance" of the text at the expense of its scientific discourse, because the text's fossilization in written form (it was originally an oral delivery) encourages the rhetoric of the paratext to overshadow the scientific discourse of the actual content. My fourth chapter will explain how Digby's verbal disdain of poetry and rhetoric in his

¹⁷ Andrew Mousley, "Kenelm Digby: Romance Autobiographer and Natural Philosopher," *The Making of the Self: Life Writing in the English Renaissance* (PhD diss., University of Kent at Canterbury, 1990), 280.

Observation upon Religio Medici is directed only at a specific class of audience (“the vulgar”) and can cohere with Digby’s “romancing” of science. I will conclude that Digby’s “poetike Idea of science” is always unstable, because Digby cannot choose between the primacy of language and ideas in human cognition, due to the rapid rationalistic developments in epistemology during his time.

CHAPTER II

LOOSE FANTASIES

As the title of the work might imply, *Loose Fantasies* is a narrative romance loosely based off of Digby's own life through age 25. The plot centers around the digressive exploits of the hero, Theagenes (a fictional counterpart of Digby), who marries Stelliana (Digby's wife, Venetia). Although we cannot verify all the content of the work, we can assume that such tall tales as an inanimate lock of hair "shewing...sense" by changing the color of a flame or a Brahman summoning an "infernal spirit" maybe did not actually happen.¹⁸ These fabulous scenes are indeed literary conventions of the work's genre as a romance, traditions which also appear in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Apart from these fantastical moments, some of the more believable events of the story are at times questionable, too. We know that Digby has a tendency to exaggerate. Elizabeth Hedrick's recent study on Digby's *A Late Discours* has averred that Digby's "claim to priority" of the sympathetic cure-all is spurious—not to mention the efficacy of the cure-all in the first place—and Digby's participation in the Duke of Buckingham's train to Spain, as portrayed in *Loose Fantasies*, seems dubious.¹⁹ As Vittorio Gabrieli, editor of the only scholarly edition of *Loose Fantasies*, has judged:

To recognize the autobiographical authenticity and grounding of the *Fantasies* does not of course justify us in taking for granted the 'literalness' or historical reliability of all, or at least of most of the details

¹⁸ Sir Kenelm Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, Temi e Testi 14, ed Vittorio Gabrieli (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1968), 67, 84.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Hedrick, "Romancing the Salve: Sir Kenelm Digby and the Powder of Sympathy," *British Journal of the History of Science* 41.2 (June 2008): 67. Vittorio Gabrieli, Introduction to *Loose Fantasies*, Temi e Testi 14 (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1968), xxviii.

and episodes connected with the protagonists...Perhaps we should all more often call to mind what Sir Kenelm wrote on a page of his *Two Treatises*: <<Our brain is but a playhouse and a scene where all these fairy masks are acted>>. He was referring to the fantasies that the outside world leaves in the imagination of man, but we may apply the remark more directly to the *Loose Fantasies*, in which Digby's mind became the stage for re-enacting and transmogrifying his actual experiences.²⁰

None of which observations should diminish Digby's stature as a romantic figure. We do know that many of his stories are factual, such as his "brave and most resolute sea fight" and his "most couragious combat which he fought with the Lord Mount le Rosare" to name a couple. The point, as Gabrieli has articulated, is that *Loose Fantasies* is a romance and Digby is exercising poetic license in creating an alternate universe of his life.

Digby's *Loose Fantasies* is not just a romance, though; it is an elite romance. Although Lori Newcomb has convincingly argued that popular and elite literature of early modern England are not segregated but co-dependent—indeed popular romance contributed to the rise of the English novel—no one in Digby's lifetime probably ever read his *Loose Fantasies*.²¹ The narrative of *Loose Fantasies* is also so preoccupied with the courtier image of its hero, Theagenes, and so steeped in erudition, evoking a variety of literary references and discoursing in dense subjects of science and philosophy, that a popular audience probably would not be able to relate to much of the work.

²⁰ Gabrieli, xxvii-iii.

²¹ Gabrieli, xi. Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

In fact, this scientific and philosophical discourse is obsessive in *Loose Fantasies*. Although philosophical and scientific discourse in fiction is not a novelty²², what is curious about Digby's *Loose Fantasies* is the fact that this discourse is sustained and rigorous. Nearly every page contains a metaphysical conceit, and philosophical dialogues abound, with Theagenes even engaging in a dense philosophical dialogue with a Hindu priest at one point. Yet because Digby is both the author and audience of the text, this scientific rigor need not necessarily read like a dry scientific or philosophical treatise. Rather, Digby, a humanist, would have read the philosophical and scientific discourse of his own work as romantic—as the speaker himself says, a kind of “journey.”²³ The philosophical and scientific discourse of *Loose Fantasies* does not just overlap with but is integrated into the romance as a psychodrama, so much so that the scientific and the romantic are literary modes of a common form—narrative.

The audience of *Loose Fantasies* seems to be a projection of Digby himself. Most critics of *Loose Fantasies* have concluded that the work was meant to be private, because the little that is known about the provenance of the manuscript suggests that Digby never shared it with anyone for circulation. As Gabrieli explains, the only extant manuscript of *Loose Fantasies* is catalogued as Harley MS 6758 in the Bodleian Library and it appears in Digby's own hand, though the manuscript could also be a second draft copied by a “professional scrivener.”²⁴ “The earliest reference to the romance, as far as I am aware,” Gabrieli continues, “occurs in 1669, four years after Sir Kenelm's

²² Recall Raphael's extended metaphysical discourse with Adam in book VIII of Milton's *PL*, as well as Dante's discourses throughout the *Divine Comedy*, especially in *Paradiso*. Gabrieli identifies this tradition as “Virgilian” (Gabrieli, 190).

²³ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 3.

²⁴ Gabrieli, xiv-v.

death...referring to the Earl of Leicester's papers at Holkham."²⁵ The first editor to publish the text, Nicholas Harris Nicolas, retitled the work *Private Memoirs*—along with castrating significant portions of the text to accommodate the Victorian sensibilities of his time—precisely because the text and the manuscript's provenance bear no evidence of a public readership. Gabrieli, although restoring the work's original title, is inclined to agree that the manuscript never circulated in Digby's lifetime, yet he does acknowledge that the manuscript "circulated among some people as early as 1669" after Digby's death.²⁶ According to the postscript, Digby composed the work as a "diversion" from seductive women while stranded on an island "and then continued and since preserved only for my own private content."²⁷ Gabrieli calls this confession "sincere," and I have no reason to doubt his judgment, since, if the work did circulate, by now we would have found a contemporary reference to the work—especially as Digby's other works are frequently referenced in his lifetime. The text and its provenance, then, suggest that the text assumes an audience that would share Digby's own intellectual eclecticism—indeed, someone just like Digby himself (as Digby writes in his *Two Treatises*, "if the likenesse were complete in euery regard, then it were no longer to be called like, but the very thing it selfe").²⁸

If the audience of Digby's *Loose Fantasies* is a projection of Digby himself, then the main character of *Loose Fantasies* is also a (loose) fictional counterpart of Digby, a character who cultivates both the contemplative and active lives. Like Digby, who, as

²⁵ Ibid., xi

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 173.

²⁸ Digby, *Two Treatises*, 357.

Diane Purkiss describes, was “a bold, sexy pirate, a wide reader...an even wider knower, an experimenter and scientist...and one of the most handsome and seductive men of his time,” Theagenes’ language is intellectual, saturated with lofty thoughts, yet just as lofty is the ambition of Theagenes and his outward acts.²⁹ In perhaps one of the most amusing, yet provocative, scenes of the romance, Theagenes, while in Morea (Spain), answers the Earl of Arcadia’s criticism of Theagenes’ magnanimity or “excess in the best and commendable things” by proposing to “make love to a mistress.”³⁰ The Earl’s criticism is a backhanded recognition that Theagenes’ “excess in the best and commendable things” lies in the courtier’s celebration of both the active and contemplative lives. Unlike “the ignorant vulgar, who judge by their senses without going much further,” the “perfect Courtier, the complete man,” as Gabrieli describes, referring to Castiliogne’s *Book of the Courtier*, “has been trained up” in “high contemplations,” as well as the “exercise of arms...as become a gentleman and a soldier.”³¹ At this point in the narrative, this acknowledgement comes as no surprise to us, since by now, Theagenes has exhibited his “high contemplations” (the contemplative life) in his dense metaphysical discourse with the Brachman and “exercise of arms” (the active life) in his heroic swordfight with some conspirators against Leodivius, the stepson of Theagenes’ relative Aristobulus (the Earl of Bristol).

Curiously, Theagenes, in his response to the Earl, only defends the contemplative life, not the active life. He attributes his “blessing” “to the sacred Muses,” the mythical

²⁹ Purkiss, 351.

³⁰ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 102-3.

³¹ Ibid., 103. Gabrieli, 195.

inspiration for contemplative activities, then boasts about the “soaring heights” of “spiritual speculations abstracted from gross matter.”³² He never makes any mention of the active life, only contrasting the contemplative life with “gross matter” or the passions—like seducing mistresses. Such an interest in the contemplative life is consistent with Theagenes’ apprehensiveness of the active life just five pages earlier, when he tells Aristobulus that “the gentler Muses” are “enemies to the troubles and disquiets that accompany an active life.”³³ Theagenes will participate in the active life but not for its own sake, as “an even mind and a quiet soul...will, and only can, make one happy in any fortune or vocation.”³⁴ As the scholastic St. Thomas Aquinas argues, “sometimes a man is called away from the contemplative life to the works of the active life, on account of some necessity of the present life, yet not so as to be compelled to forsake contemplation altogether.”³⁵

Although verbally Theagenes prefers the contemplative life, in practice, Theagenes enjoys the active life just as much. Critics have called the narrative of *Loose Fantasies* “Platonic,” yet this description is not comprehensive. It is just as much Aristotelian as it is Platonic for its celebration of civic virtue. Theagenes, as a courtier, must practice what Castiliogne calls “a certain recklessness [*sprezzatura*] to cover art withall,” in order to exhibit, as Gabrieli says, “real gentility.”³⁶ Thus, Theagenes’ self-deprecation when approached by Aristobulus to accompany Hephaestion (the Duke of

³² Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 104

³³ Ibid., 98

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), II.II.182.1.

³⁶ Castiliogne, Book I, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (1561). Gabrieli, 195

Buckingham) can be interpreted as an act of *sprezzatura* to conceal effort and ambition.

A similar practice is evident when Theagenes must justify his voyage to the

Mediterranean to Stelliana near the end of the romance:

The sense of his honour came to his thoughts, and banished all weak tenderness out of his heart, so that he remained unmoveable in his resolutions, although he could not choose but grieve extremely at her sorrow...and make use of all the arguments that he could bethink himself, to induce her to endure his short absence with patience...acquainting her with the motives that induced him to undertake this voyage...Since that he was resolved to retire himself to a private life where, removed from the cumbersome distractions of the court or city, he might without any interruption enjoy the quiet blessings of her sweet conversation...But that if he should do it abruptly and of a sudden, it could not be without the impeachment of his honour [and worldly dignity]³⁷

Theagenes' apparent "motive" not to "retire" from the active life "abruptly and of a sudden" is here reduced to one of many "arguments that he could bethink himself"; it is graceful rhetoric to conceal his true motive, which is to live an active life. Yet this active life is not incompatible with his love for Stelliana, even if it requires him to travel abroad. Earlier, Theagenes tells Stelliana that he "desires" to be "styled her knight, which title he would ever glory in and do her all the real services that it might challenge from him."³⁸ In order to perform courtly love, the hallmark of the romance, Theagenes must live an active life (cultivate civic virtue). Thus, Digby himself, in the title page to his pamphlet "Sir Kenelm Digbeys Honour Maintained," is depicted in a woodcut as dueling bravely with (and killing) the contemptuous Lord Mount le Ros and then described as now living in England "to his eternall honour" (Fig. 1).³⁹ Though perhaps a

³⁷ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁹ Sir Kenelm Digby, "Sir Kenelme Digbeys Honour Maintained..." (London, 1641).

hyperbolic moment not so characteristic of *sprezzatura* (the audience of the pamphlet is also the popular reader, however), the point is that to be “styled” Stelliana’s “knight”—Theagenes’ whole purpose in the narrative—Theagenes must pursue an active life; he must show outward bravery and virtue for the community.

Such a chivalric worldview celebrating the active life does not necessarily contradict Theagenes’ preference for the contemplative life, and this paradox occurs precisely because Theagenes does not distinguish between the active and contemplative lives. The active and contemplative lives are not separate ethics but two modes of the same ethic (virtue); they exist on a continuum of virtue.⁴⁰ In the introduction to the romance, Digby figures mental activity (the contemplative life) in dramatic terms:

But [rational agents] being composed of such differing parts, that one may well say they bear about within them a perpetual civil war—the rational part striving to preserve her dignity and the superiority due to her, as being the nobler substance; and the inferior part, wherein reign the mists and clouds of various and inconstant passions... Which hath made me... fix [my looser thoughts] upon this subject, through the desire I have had to direct this my journey in a right way, which is of so much importance that the least going astray out of the true path brings a continual sickness to the mind⁴¹

⁴⁰ Given Digby’s macrocosmic-microcosmic worldview, Digby’s collapsing of distinctions between the active and contemplative lives would seem to make his metaphysics monist, yet it does not seem to. Though an atomist, Digby defended a dualistic metaphysics in his *Two Treatises*. The closest he comes to flirting with monism is in the Brachman scene in *Loose Fantasies*. During Theagenes’ conversation with the Brachman, they engage in an extended discourse about how celestial or spiritual creatures (angelic intelligences and even demons) can act on sublunary matter, given their substantial divide. The Brachman proposes three metaphysical explanations for this phenomenon, an *animus mundi*, materialist monism and dualism, but concludes that the question is speculation of the unknown (81). Perhaps Digby would not see a tension here. In *Two Treatises*, after expressing contradictory beliefs in direct realism and indirect realism in the prefaces of each *Treatise*, Digby concludes that the “quarrell... be only about the word, not about the matter: and that indeede, both of vs, do meane the same” (201). Further research might want to compare Digby to monists like Spinoza, Anne Conway and Milton.

⁴¹ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 2-3.

The narrator's characterization of the contemplative life in terms of the active life indicates no substantial difference between the two. Echoing the opening lines of Dante's *Inferno*, cultivating a proper interior life is no less romantic than the pursuits of the active life; it is a "journey" and at times even a "civil war" (recall the "exercise of arms...as become a gentleman and a soldier"); it is a kind of psychodrama.⁴² The active life performs virtuous actions, which presuppose wisdom or true knowledge, and the contemplative life requires a virtuous state of mind in order to see through falsehood and participate in the heavenly community (God's kingdom)—*mens sana in corpore sano*.

Not only is the contemplative life like the active life as a psycho-drama, but this psycho-drama is chivalric—one's intellectual pursuits are a graceful service. In the opening to Digby's *Observations on Spencer's Faerie Queene*, Digby displays more *sprezzatura* by deprecating himself ("I am too well acquainted with the weaknesses of mine abilities...to flatter my self with the hope I may either inform your understanding") with the same formula Theagenes does to Aristobulus ("My own imperfections, much honoured Lord, are so apparent to me who am daily conversant with them").⁴³ Yet in this instance, the feigned disgracing is not meant to conceal an ambition for the active life but Digby's effort at composing the explication (at the end of the work, Digby presents his 25 page criticism having been written "the first halfe quarter of an houre" "without having reduced it to any better form").⁴⁴ Digby views his (contemplative) task of

⁴² As Elizabeth Spiller explains, to the Renaissance humanist, the discovery of knowledge is an act of "invention," a begetting of ideas through midwifery (dialectic), which requires active participation of the student. Digby is taking this conception a step further (Spiller, 3)

⁴³ Sir Kenelm Digby, "Observations on the 22. stanza in the 9th. canto of the 2d. book of Spencers Faery Queen..." (London, 1643), 1-2. Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 98.

⁴⁴ Digby, "Observations," 25.

explicating the lines from Spenser's *Faerie Queen* as a gentlemanly service to a friend ("obedience to your command weigheth much more with me, then the lawfulness of any excuse can") but also to truth ("I am so desirous you should be possest with the true knowledge").⁴⁵ In short, just as Theagenes serves Stelliana as a "knight," so too, under this romantic conception of the contemplative life, does the "complete man" serve truth as a knight or a gentleman.

This service is romantic because it is an act of love. In the introduction to *Loose Fantasies*, the narrator gives us love as the model for virtue:

But at length I perceived that that Infinite Light, which illumineth all things, is never wanting to illustrate such a mind as with due humility and diligence maketh itself fit to receive it: for it was not long before such an example occurred to me...It was the perfect friendship and love of two generous persons, that seemed to be born in this age by ordinance of heaven to teach the world anew what it hath long forgotten, the mystery of loving with honour and constancy, between man and woman; both of them in the vigour of their youth, and both blessed by nature with eminent endowments, as well of the mind as of the body⁴⁶

Both the active and contemplative lives serve the same principle—"loving with honour and constancy." Following the great chain of being, the love between the mind and body (a hypostatic union) is a microcosm of the love between man and woman and likewise is the love between man and woman a microcosm of the love between God and man. As a refraction of God, the divine Stelliana (Theagenes' Beatrice) is not incompatible with divine Truth. Theagenes, though he has his failures, subscribes to a Christian humanism that sanctifies the world, glorifying both the internal (contemplative) and external (active) as a romance.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1-2.

⁴⁶ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 5.

Just as the active and contemplative lives are two modes of the same practice of virtue, even so are science and romance two literary modes of narrative, because science is a psychodrama or psycho-narrative. When the Earl of Arcadia deprecates Theagenes' "higher contemplations," he cites Theagenes' "train[ing] up continually in scholastical speculations." Scientific and philosophical discourse or "scholastical speculations" are an activity of the contemplative life. By the same token, the romance of Theagenes' "exercise of arms...as become a gentleman and a soldier" and his courtship of Stelliana (as opposed to Mardontius' seduction of Stelliana, a pursuit of the passions or "grosser matter") are a practice of the active life. As manifestations of the active and contemplative lives, science and romance, in the narrative text, Digby would have read (and written) them as literary modes. Thus, the scientific discourse is not an out-of-place digression but another way of executing drama. The discourse demands a moral awareness of the reader, and the reader must act out, in his own mind, the very scientific demonstrations in the text, just as he would imagine the fictions of the text, lest the reader succumb to error and lose his love, truth.

According to this doctrine of romantic science, scientific rigor is just as magnanimous as the bravery of arms. In the final sentences of Digby's *A Late Discours*, Digby, perhaps channeling the Brachman scene of *Loose Fantasies*, Digby critiques thinkers who would resort to superstition:

Now it is a poor kind of pusillanimity, and faintnesse of heart, or rather a grosse ignorance of the Understanding, to pretend any effects of charm or magick herein, or to confine all the actions of Natre, to the grossnesse of our senses, when we have not sufficiently considered, nor examined the true causes and principles whereon tis fitting we should ground our

judgement: we need not have recourse to a Demon or Angel in such difficulties.⁴⁷

Digby's use of the word "pusillanimity" is provocative. Before preparing to embark for his voyage to the Mediterranean in *Loose Fantasies*, the speaker describes Theagenes as having "equal constancy and magnanimity [to] overcome the many difficulties and oppositions that occurred to him."⁴⁸ Intellectual dedication, according to this ethic, is magnanimous because it requires the same bravery of spirit that a gentleman trained in arms does. If resorting to supernatural explanations for phenomena is the sign of "pusillanimity" or "faintness of heart," being able to persevere intellectually for rational explanations to the world is the sign of greatness of heart, of the romantic love of truth.

To Digby, this integration of science and romance, whether in *Loose Fantasies* or his scientific treatises, would be no different than John Donne's metaphysical poetry. In fact, much of the scientific language in *Loose Fantasies* performs double duty—to communicate a discourse, as well as to create poetry. In his first spoken lines of the work, after Stelliana insists that she is unworthy of Theagenes' love, Theagenes protests:

You would do too great a wrong, fairest Stelliana...to my clear flame, if at least any injustice can proceed from so divine a hand, in thinking that there were need of any other motive for me to love you but yourself: for angels and souls love where they discover greatest perfections, and I were too blind if I did not discern yours. So that in me, where knowledge and understanding is the ground of a noble and spiritual love, and other obligations are scarcely considerable; for that knowledge and love have converted me into a part of you, and your goodness having united you to me, I can no more give you thanks for any merit towards me⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Sir Kenelm Digby, *A Late Discourse Made in a Solemne Assembly of Nobles and Learned Men at Montpellier in France Touching the Cure of Wounds by the Powder of Sympathy* (London, 1658), 81-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.

Theagenes' language is eloquent—direct (“You would do too great a wrong”), yet delicate (“if at least any injustice can proceed from so divine a hand”), philosophical, yet poetic (“angels and souls love where they discover greatest perfections”). A few scenes later, after Theagenes believes Stelliana has betrayed him, he even dramatizes a metaphysical conceit:

yet, thus much I will swear...I will have irreconcilable wars with that perfidious sex; and so blaze through the world their unworthiness and falsehood, that I hope their turn will come to sue to men for their love, and being denied, despair and die. And thou, once dear pledge of my lady's virgin affections, but now the magical filter of her enchanting and siren-like beauty, thou canst witness how I have, day and night, ever since I wore thee, sighed her name; be now her forerunner into the fire, that will one day torment her traitorous soul; and as thou consumest there like a sacrifice to the infernal furies, of whom only vengeance is begged, and that thy grosser element turneth into ashes, may thy lighter and airy parts mingle itself with the wind, and tell her from me that when rage and despair have severed my injured soul from my cold limbs, my ghostly shadow shall be every where present to her.⁵⁰

The language is musical (“and being denied, despair and die,” “once dear pledge,” “her forerunner into the fire,” “torment her traitorous soul,” “sacrifice to the infernal furies,” etc.) and at the same time metaphysical (“and that thy grosser element turneth into ashes, may thy lighter and airy parts mingle itself with the wind”). Gabrieli identifies Donne's “The Bracelet” and “The Apparition” as analogues to the lock of hair and Theagenes' “ghostly shadow every where present to her,” and the observation is apt. The resemblance between Donne's “metaphysical poetry”—though an anachronistic phrase—and Digby's romantic science is not a coincidence. Both styles are emerging at a time when distinctions between the scientific and the literary are confused. The next

⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

chapter will investigate how these same modes of scientific discourse and romance manifest themselves in a different genre—the scientific treatise.

CHAPTER III

DIGBY'S "POETIKE IDEA OF SCIENCE" IN *TWO TREATISES*

Other than his work on his sympathetic cure-all, Digby's magisterial discourse on natural philosophy and metaphysics, *Two Treatises*, is perhaps Digby's most well known book for its thorough engagement of the scientific conversations of the day. Between his itinerant lifestyle of rallying support for the Royalist cause as Chancellor to Queen Henrietta Maria and acting as a Catholic agent for Rome, Digby composed his magnum opus in the 1640s, which text exceeds 450 pages, two thirds of which discuss physical bodies and the last third of which discusses the immortality of the soul and her faculties.⁵¹ The work is one of the first texts to defend the physician William Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood;⁵² it reiterates Digby's theory for his sympathetic cure-all/"weapon's salve";⁵³ it expresses an atomist theory of matter and attempts to adapt an Aristotelian metaphysical scheme to contemporary scientific theories, especially those of Paracelsus, Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes and Harvey.⁵⁴

The work is also intriguing for its philosophical indeterminacy. In an era when scientific discoveries were challenging traditional conceptions of the universe—whether Ptolemaic cosmogony, the great chain of being or the spirituality of man—*Two Treatises*, like much of the literature of the 17th century, typifies the general philosophical incertitude of the period. Roy Digby Thomas, the most recent biographer

⁵¹ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 236. Thomas, 191.

⁵² Digby, *Two Treatises*, 132-42. Thomas, 192. Petersson, 184.

⁵³ Ibid., 164-5.

⁵⁴ Caleb Edward Mason. *Conciliatory Eclecticism and the Philosophy of Kenelm Digby* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2001). Betty Jo Dobbs, "Studies in the Natural Philosophy of Sir Kenelm Digby, I," *Ambix* 18 (1971): 16-25.

of Digby, as well as a descendent of Digby, writes that *Two Treatises* “was nothing less than an attempt to make sense and order of the universe, yet ultimately Kenelm could not distinguish clearly enough the rational, precise and material scientific world from his rather rigid, preconceived spiritual and religious views.”⁵⁵ R.T. Petersson concurs that “for Digby the personal conflict between religion and science was for ever unresolved.”⁵⁶

Aside from the intrigue of the scientific content of the text, the publication history of the book is interesting in its own right as well for constituting the received identity of the book. The work was first published in Paris in 1644, then reprinted in London in 1645, 1658, 1665 and 1669.⁵⁷ As Adrian Johns explains, in his comprehensive tome on printing in the English 17th century, *The Nature of the Book*, neither Digby nor the state licensers had any authority over the printing of *Two Treatises*.⁵⁸ “At least two English editions followed rapidly” from the French edition, Johns says. “One was produced by George Thomason and Octavian Pulleyn, the other by Francis Eggesfield, Edward Blackmore, and John Williams. Their consequent confrontation helped to define the identity of the work.”⁵⁹ Both groups of printers were competing for the exclusive rights to print *Two Treatises*, with Thomason and Pulleyn attempting to get it licensed as a philosophy publication, and Eggesfield, et al. trying to get it licensed as a divinity publication. Ultimately, the Stationers Company ruled that

⁵⁵ Thomas, 191.

⁵⁶ Petersson, 210.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Garth Huston, *Sir Kenelm Digby: Checklist*. 5.

⁵⁸ Johns, 238.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 236.

only the Thomason and Pulleyn edition was authorized, and *Two Treatises* was officially registered as a philosophy publication, not a divinity publication.

Though traditionally received as a philosophical discourse, Digby's *Two Treatises* is nonetheless a work of literary criticism, too. Nearly an entire chapter of the second treatise after all consists of a discussion of rhetoric and poetry. The work, then, is of value not just to philosophers, book historians and historians of science but also to literature scholars. With this interest of *Two Treatises*' literary criticism in mind, I would like to argue that *Two Treatises*, in spite of Digby's protest that different theories of cognition are inconsequential, constantly revises its theories of cognition in order to accommodate what Digby calls his "poetike Idea of science."

The term "discourse" in the 17th century connotes at least two meanings in relation to human actions—the faculty of reasoning and communication with words. The word derives from the Latin noun *discursus* or "running to and fro" and in addition to its more familiar meaning as a human action, "discourse" also refers to the more general sense of a "succession of time."⁶⁰ According to the *OED*, the earliest known precedent of the word "discourse" occurs in Book V of Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* when Lady Philosophy is elaborating on the nature of God's foreknowledge or "prescience," "but it [the Intelligence] biholdeth alle things, so I shal seye, by a stroke of thought formerly, *withoute discours or collacioun*."⁶¹ In this context, the word is referring to the faculty of reasoning unique to human minds, as

⁶⁰ J.A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, ed., *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2009).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

opposed to God's Providence or angelic intuition. This use of the word "discourse" persists through the 17th century and usually occurs in philosophical contexts like Chaucer's translation of Boethius, such as the second elegy to Sir John Davies *Nosce Teipsum*, "The Immortality of the Soul," "Nor can herself discourse or judge of ought, But what the sense collects." The other, perhaps more common, meaning of the word refers to human conversation and by the 16th century, begins to replace the Middle English word "spelling," which also meant "the act of speaking; an utterance, instance of speech, discourse."⁶² Thus, Sir Francis Bacon's essay "Of Discourse," even though it does allude to the meaning of discourse as an act of the mind, reflects on discourse primarily as a speech act.

Such semantic ambiguity of the word "discourse" reveals an epistemological primacy of cognition over language. In St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa*, the Doctor of the Church insists on a difference between the act of reason (discourse as a mental act) and the product of that act (discourse as a speech act), "we may consider the work and the work done, for instance the work of building and the house built; so in the acts of reason, we may consider the act itself of reason, i.e. to understand and to reason, and something produced by this act."⁶³ In these terms, discourse, *qua* an act of the mind, is the cognitive "work of building" understanding before that understanding is fashioned in words, while discourse, *qua* a speech act, is the verbal "product" of the mind's work of understanding.⁶⁴ When we experience the phenomenon of having thoughts with the

⁶² Ibid. Robert E. Lewis, ed., *Middle English Dictionary*. 424.

⁶³ Aquinas, *Summa*, I. II. 90. i. a1.

⁶⁴ Joseph Owens, C.Ss., *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston, TX: University of St. Thomas, 1992), 33.

words on the tip of our tongues, as they say, we can ascertain this distinction between mental and verbal discourse. Paralleling this distinction, to a scholastic like Aquinas, is the difference between a concept and a logical term, an act of judgment and a logical proposition and ultimately, an act of reasoning and a logical syllogism. The latter terms in these pairings (term, proposition and syllogism) are merely logical (or verbal) expressions of pre-existing acts of the mind (a concept/simple apprehension, judgment and reasoning), which inform the logical expressions. As students, like Digby, in Oxbridge in the 17th century were still being educated in this scholastic tradition,⁶⁵ even with the rise of reform schools during this period, many students of philosophy not only would have recognized a distinction between discourse as a cognitive act and discourse as a speech act but would have privileged cognition as the origin of language, which only represents reality and does not constitute it.

In the scholastic tradition, because cognition includes both intellectual and sensory activity, discourse as a cognitive act can make reality claims outside of one's subjectivity. As Existential Thomists Fr. Joseph Owens and John F.X. Knasas have reasoned, sensation participates in human cognition just as much as ideas do, because the human mind directly apprehends external reality.⁶⁶ "Knowledge is regulated according as *the thing known is in the knower*," as Aquinas says.⁶⁷ Recurrent in Aquinas' works is an emphatic use of the verb "to be" or *esse*. Though on one hand the use of "to be" reflects a stylistic preference for plain writing, the diction also echoes a philosophical

⁶⁵ Charles B. Schmitt, "The Rise of the Philosophical Textbook," *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 792-804.

⁶⁶ Owens, 37-9.

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa*, I.I.12.4.

understanding of *esse*—or the act of existence—as a *sui generis*, a class unto itself that is ineluctable. If the materialist reduces all of reality to matter, the scholastic Thomist reduces all of reality to existence. Fr. Owens explains:

Cognition, then, has to be explained in terms of existence. The house exists in itself, but also exists in the awareness of the one perceiving or knowing it... This traditional explanation of cognition as a way of existence is strange at first to those who approach it from a background of modern or postmodern philosophy. But it fits normally into an Aristotelian or Scholastic setting.⁶⁸

External reality has a real presence in the mind, just as much as the Body of Christ would have a Real Presence in the Eucharist, and this cognitive existence of reality is received, in Aristotelian hylomorphic parlance, formally or immaterially.⁶⁹ The co-existence of the self and external reality in the same form (the human mind) is possible without the destruction of the self because of what Aristotle calls an “amplitude” of form over matter.⁷⁰ Thus, this direct realist model of cognition, where the mind literally *becomes* the very objects it senses—or what Owens and Knasas call “the primacy of the external”⁷¹—expands the parameters of cognition beyond mere ideas or notions to external reality. Such an assertion has profound consequences for discourse, because it allows a subject to make external reality claims with certitude. A privileging of cognition over language, then, need not result in a Cartesian solipsism, so long as cognition includes more contents than mere ideas.

This broader understanding of cognition adds an exception to the modern discourse studies’ narrative of cognition consisting of only ideas and language.

⁶⁸ Owens, 39

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 37-9

⁷¹ Ibid., 33

According to Michel Foucault's narrative, the Renaissance "episteme," or system of knowledge, differs from the "Classical" (or Cartesian) framework of cognition (or "thought"), because the Renaissance episteme does not subordinate language to ideas; language permeates the world and is the basis for knowledge, in large part because of the *liber mundi* (the "book of nature") trope/analogy.⁷² With the introduction of Descartes' *cogito* and dualism, the grounds for knowledge shift interiorly to the mind, with language as a mechanical instrument for expression and ideas as its governor. Only in postmodernity does language regain its primacy not only as the center of cognition, as in the Renaissance, but as a constitutive, not just representative, principle of meaning to Foucault.⁷³ Yet, as Ian Maclean has observed, Foucault's narrative assumes a "Platonist" debate over cognition, at the neglect of the Aristotelian or empiricist tradition that just as much informs the debate in the early modern period.⁷⁴ In other words, the terms of the debate over cognition consist not only of ideas and language but also things themselves or external reality. If Renaissance thinkers held the principle of the "primacy of the external"—at least those thinkers with an Aristotelian bent—then Foucault perhaps overstates his case that language in the Renaissance is the focus of cognition. Just because ideas are not privileged over language does not eliminate external reality itself as a contender with language in cognition. Nevermind language in the Renaissance

⁷² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2002), 47.

⁷³ Ibid., 330-5.

⁷⁴ Ian Maclean, "Foucault's Renaissance Episteme Reassessed: An Aristotelian Counterblast," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59.1 (1998), 149. I am aware that revisions to Foucault's theory of cognition exist, especially with the trendy interest in philosophy/science in early modernism and because of the impact of Maclean's article, but due to dogmatic deadlines, I have not had time to study them for this version of the thesis. I choose Foucault as the mouthpiece for modern discourse studies not as a strawman but because his theory offers familiar terms to contextualize the debate over human cognition and discourse.

being only representative, not constitutive, language, among philosophers in the Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions, was not even of central importance to cognition.

The “book of nature” metaphor, the basis for Foucault’s narrative of the Renaissance, is variable after all. The trope refers to the Christian precept of the natural world in some way reflecting God’s law or Revelation, as the law of God is “written” in the “hearts” of man.⁷⁵ The nature of this analogy between the physical world and Revelation, however, differs according to its use. As Peter Harrison argues, in his essay, “‘The Book of Nature’ and Early Modern Science,” “close examination of these ‘book’ metaphors...reveals a remarkable diversity of meanings and contexts”—especially between the Middle Ages and Renaissance because of the rise of Protestantism.⁷⁶ The “book of nature” metaphor is not a unified tradition not only between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, though, but even within the Middle Ages and Renaissance periods themselves. To some traditions, such as Thomism, the metaphor would merely mean that nature is in harmony with Scripture. Thus, nature is a book in so far that it coheres with the Book of God or in Harrison’s terms, nature is a “mirror.” As Aquinas says in his *Summa contra Gentiles* when reconciling philosophy with theology, “Sacred writings are bound in two volumes, that of Creation and that of Holy Scripture.”⁷⁷ Others, such as Paracelsus,⁷⁸ would have extended the metaphor more literally to conclude that nature, as a “book,” must be “read.” In other words, nature is never just sensed but always

⁷⁵ Jer 31:33.

⁷⁶ Peter Harrison, “‘The Book of Nature’ and Early Modern Science,” *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, ed. Klaas van Berkel, Arie Johan Vanderjagt and Arjo Vanderjagt, Peeters Publishers, 2006, 1.

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, II.5.iv.

⁷⁸ “But we men discover all that is hidden in the mountains by signs and outward correspondences.” Paracelsus, *Archidoxis magica*.

perceived or interpreted; reality can never be experienced directly (as it is) but must always be decoded or, as Husserl might say, “bracketed.” This latter tradition of the *liber mundi* metaphor precludes the “primacy of the external,” as our minds or subjectivity are always judging (or projecting onto) the external and, thus, subordinating it.

To this latter phenomenological tradition of nature always undergoing interpretation do most literature, linguistic and discourse studies narratives point. As R.V. Young insists, in *At War with the Word*, *Logos* is the fundamental principle of Christian theology—“in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”⁷⁹ *Logos*, however, does not just mean language or “words” but also ideas; hence the distinction between *logos* and *lexis*. In other words, while this phenomenological tradition of nature as an “interpreted” book is valid, it is not a comprehensive representation of Renaissance thought, because the *liber mundi* metaphor, like the term *logos*, carries more than one meaning. Most scholars of literature seem naturally attracted to this phenomenological tradition, however, because it privileges language (the elemental principle of literature) over any other principle (whether ideas or external reality). If external reality consists of signs or a kind of language, then this view expands the territory of literature scholars in their enterprise for interdisciplinary studies—an effort that, at the risk of sounding provincial, at times seems insidiously imperialistic for stealing jurisdiction from philosophy. Not a coincidence is the irony that R.V. Young, in spite of his self-proclaimed “logocentrism,”

⁷⁹ John 1:1.

admittedly shares nearly as much in common with Derrida as Augustine.⁸⁰ In a similar context, John F.X. Knasas characterizes the post-Vatican II preference Transcendental Thomism—or what he paradoxically calls “Augustinian-Kantian Thomism”—as a preference for the romantic over philosophy:

because of its relentless a posteriori approach, neo-Thomism appears as so cool and detached as to be singularly unappealing. In contrast, Transcendental Thomism provides an engaging portrayal of our inner life as conscious beings. The description of human nature as radically orientated to God, as naturally desiring God, is enticing and flattering. It seems to ring true to our felt dissatisfaction with our existence, and it does seem to express the agreement we all concede when reading Augustine's "My heart is restless until it rests in You."

The belief that language (*logos*) permeates the world is a romantic worldview, because external reality, now as a sign, becomes more of a mystery; it is unknown, occult—a secret to be discovered.

Like the varying receptions of the “book of nature” metaphor and *Logos*, Kenelm Digby’s theory of cognition, in his *Two Treatises*, is divided between the traditions of Thomism (a preference for the external) and Cartesianism (a preference for ideas). Especially as a practicing Catholic (at least except for his brief conversion to Anglicanism), Digby sympathizes with Thomism, often invoking Aquinas and Aristotle in his works. In his chapter on “Local Motion,” Digby adduces Aquinas, Aristotle and “their intelligent commentatours” when maintaining his insistence—to the point of obsession, as he repeats the rule in nearly every chapter—that “qualities” or “accidents”

⁸⁰ Young, 44. One book reviewer of *At War with the Word* has judged that Young “shows—with help from St. Augustine and Flannery O'Connor—where deconstructionists and Christians agree.”

have no autonomous existence.⁸¹ Yet Digby is not consistently Thomist or Aristotelian.

A case in point is Digby's conflicting views of realism. In the beginning of the first treatise, "Of Bodies," Digby articulates an indirect realist theory of cognition:

It is true, wordes serue to expresse thinges: but if you obserue the matter well; you will perceiue they doe so, onely according to the pictures we make of them in our owne thoughts, and not according as the thinges are in their proper natures. Which is very reasonable it should be so; *since the soule, that giueth the names, hath nothing of the thinges in her but these notions, and knoweth not the thinges otherwise then by these notions*: and therefore can not giue other names but such as must signify the thinges by mediation of these notions.⁸²

According to this account of cognition, "notions" in the mind—or a *species expressa* in scholastic parlance—mediate the soul's simple apprehension of the external world, so that the external is never directly known but experienced through signs. Yet in the chapter on "Simple Apprehensions" of the second treatise, "The Nature and Operations of Man's Soul," Digby advocates for a Thomistic direct realist theory of cognition to argue that "the very nature of a thing apprehended, *is truly in the man*, who doth apprehend it."⁸³ In a rather unconvincing attempt to reconcile this discrepancy, Digby concludes at the end of the preface to the second treatise that the "quarrell...be only about the word, not about the matter: and that indeede, both of vs, do meane the same."⁸⁴ While Digby verbally asserts that indirect and direct realist views of cognition are ultimately synonymous, this resolution is neither so facile, nor genuine.

Yet just as attracted is Digby towards a preference for the primacy of language in cognition. In his chapter "Of Discourse" in the second treatise, Digby equivocates on

⁸¹ Digby, *Two Treatises*, 70

⁸² Digby, *Two Treatises*, 2

⁸³ Ibid., 356

⁸⁴ Ibid., 201

the word “discourse” in order to assert the ubiquity of the act and, thus, science, which depends on discourse. Throughout the chapter “Of Discourse,” Digby refers to the acts of the mind in logical terms, describing judgments as “propositions,” simple apprehensions as “terms,” discourses as “syllogisms.” Such language indicates that Digby is referring to discourse as a speech act, not a cognitive act. “The first and most simple of perfect discourses,” Digby says, is that “which Logicians call a syllogisme.”⁸⁵ Digby continues in order to argue that “Now these Syllogismes, that the life of man as man, doth consist in discourse, and of the vast extent of being as it were interlaced and wouen one within an other...do breede, or rather are all the variety of mans life.”⁸⁶ Digby is not just referring to discourse as a speech act here; he is collapsing the distinction between speech acts and cognitive acts. To Digby, the “variety of man’s life”—or perhaps cognitive life or awareness—consists entirely of epicheirema or clusters of syllogisms, “interlaced and wouen one with an other.” All discourse is, to Digby, is a “long chaine” of syllogisms or speech acts. Digby’s nominalist view of discourse as a speech act culminates in Digby’s discussion of “locution” or speaking:

it were a great ouersight to forgett that faculty...and that is, the power of speech...It consisteth in two actions: the one outward, the other inward: the outward, is the giuing of various soundes to our breath...I am persuaded, the like might be effected by insensible creatures, if a dexterous man would employ his time, in contriuing and making an instrument to expresse those different soundes...The inward action of locution, is the framing of conuenient answeres to what is asked; of fitt replies to what is said; and in a word, to speake appositely, and to the

⁸⁵ Digby, *Two Treatises*, 376

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 377

purpose; wherevnto, neyther beast nor dead instrument can be brought,
vnlesse the artificier be able to endue it with vnderstanding.⁸⁷

Digby conclusion that irrational animals can only imitate the “outward” mechanical act of language, not the “inward” act is based off of Descartes’ reasoning from *Discourse on Method*, that “Reason is an universal instrument that is alike available on every occasion, these organs, on the contrary, need a particular arrangement for each particular action” and, thus, as physical parts, would need to be in infinite supply to substitute for the role of reason, an immaterial faculty.⁸⁸ More importantly, however, Digby argues that even mental discourse or “the framing of conuenient answers” is an “action of locution.” In short, by labeling mental discourse as “inward locution,” Digby is blurring the distinction between discourse as a speech and cognitive act.

Perhaps because of his fear of losing romance along with the primacy of language does Digby deny any difference between discourse as a speech act and a cognitive act, even at the expense of the consistency in his beliefs. If discourse consists entirely of words (or “syllogisms”) after all, then the center of cognition is neither the external world, as Digby argues in the beginning of the second treatise, nor ideas, as Digby argues in the beginning of the first treatise. By sacrificing his already contradictory subscriptions to Thomism and Cartesianism—at least in this instance—Digby is retaining what he calls a “poetike Idea of science” that privileges language in human thought. Critics have described *Two Treatises* as “rationalistic,” hyper-intellectual and hostile to the poetic language that Thomas Browne adopts in *Religio*

⁸⁷ Ibid., 382

⁸⁸ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, The Harvard Classics 34.1, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14), par. 9. Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 158.

Medici.⁸⁹ Yet in one of the richest passages from the *Two Treatises* for its multiple implications, Digby reveals that if his science has any vulnerability, it is too poetic, for claiming that “knowledge hath no limits; nothing escapeth the toyles of science”:

And if any man, that is not invred to raise his thoughts *aboue the pitch of the outward obiects he conuerseth dayly with*, should suspect that what I haue now said, is rather *like the longing dreames of passionate louers*, whose desires feede them with impossibilities, then that it is any reall truth; or should imagine that it is but a *poetike Idea of science*, that neuer was or will be in act: or if any other, that hath his discoursing faculty vitiated and peruerted, by hauing beene imbued in the schooles with vnsound and vmbratile principles, should persuade himselfe, that howsoeuer the pretenders vnto learning and science, may talke loude of all thinges, and *make a noise with scholastike termes*, and persuade their ignorant hearers that they speake and vnfold deepe mysteries, yet in very truth, nothing at all can be knowne: I shall beseech them both, to suspend their coniectures or beliefes herein, and to reserue their censure of me, whether or no I haue strained too farre, vntill the learned author of the *Dialogues of the world*, haue enriched it with the worke he hath composed of *Metaphysikes*⁹⁰

Digby’s derisive description of his critics who cannot rise “aboue the pitch of the outward obiects” is ambiguous. On one hand, Digby is inveighing against the same (Cavalier?) anti-intellectual hedonism that Theagenes disdains in *Loose Fantasies* and which Digby perceived in himself.⁹¹ Just as likely, Digby is evoking the same language he uses to discredit Thomas Browne in *Observations upon Religio Medici* for Browne’s allegedly careless use of scholastic terms.⁹² Digby also seems to be addressing a specific class of scholastics, who were resistant towards recognizing the discoveries in natural philosophy and science. By extension, Digby may even be backhandedly criticizing scholastic direct realism by his characterization of pure sensation of the external world

⁸⁹ Wong, 126.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 379, italics mine.

⁹¹ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 104.

⁹² Digby, *Observations upon Religio Medici*, 14-6.

or “outward objects” as “pitch.”⁹³ Regardless, most noteworthy of all is the fact that nowhere does Digby ever deny that his science is “poetike” or “like the longing dreames of passionate lovers.” Rather, Digby denies that these romantic modes of his science are not incompatible with “reall truth” and practicality (to “be in act”).

Digby’s science is “poetike” not just because it claims endless territory for discovery, but because he figures science in dramatic terms. In his argument for the substantial existence of the soul and persistent identity, Digby describes the brain and human imagination in dramatic terms:

Nay, if all the beautifull and ayry fantasmies, which fly about so nimbly in our braine, be nothing else but signes vnto in our soule, of what is without [outside of] vs; it is euident, that though peraduenture she would not without their seruice, exercise that which by error we misse name Thinking; yet the very same soule and thinker might be without them all: and consequently, without braine also; seeing that our braine is but the playhouse and scene, where all these faery maskes are acted: so that in conclusion.⁹⁴

Not only does Digby’s choice of metaphor, “faery maske,” associate intellectual activity with drama but it specifies the act of thinking to a particular genre of drama—the courtly masque. On one hand, the brain is a scene for intellectual drama, where our memory and imagination can re-enact visual images, but the brain also enacts discourse as a

⁹³ Although the language smacks of Platonism, Digby himself was hardly a Platonist or Neo-Platonist. While R.T. Petersson asserts that Digby prefers philosophy to “the ornaments of art,” this Platonic interpretation of Digby is not comprehensive—especially as we have already seen in Digby’s humanism in *Loose Fantasies*. Digby does not categorically disdain poetry, as if all poets should be banished from the Republic, but favors only certain brands of poetry. In fact, in the same breath of describing the body as the “obscure dungeon of noysome flesh” for the soul, Digby disparages “the Platonike Philosophers” in his *Two Treatises* for not providing “a sufficient cause of [the soul] being locked into a body” and for deprecating the soul by “putt[ing] forgettfulnesse in a pure spirit” as the soul. Moreover, the Cambridge Platonists of the 17th century, though a motley crew, were not fond of Digby either, and Nathaniel Culverwel in particular criticized Digby’s *Two Treatises* after the book’s publication.⁹³ Digby, then, could (and did) adopt Platonic language without implying a Platonist worldview.

⁹⁴ Digby, *Two Treatises*, 416.

drama in search of truth. Moreover, this drama is romantic, consistent with the conventions of the masque, in which we court truth, are often lost in interpretive thickets, the dark wood of Dante, and are misled by faeries and chimeras, as Digby would like to say. While this trope of science as a “faery maske” remains undeveloped in the treatise, it suggests an impulse towards salvaging romance in his rationalism that struggles between affirming ideas, externals and language as the center of cognition.

If Digby’s science is “poetike,” then his literary theory is likewise scientific, as he mixes the discourses of rhetorical theory and body theory when accounting for rhetorical pathetic appeals. Seeming to invoke the principle of the great chain of being, Digby explains that rhetoric’s inspiration of emotion in an audience has analogies to the contagiousness of yawns and laughter and implicitly even to the curing of wounds with his powder of sympathy. Defining rhetoric as “The art whereby we may persuade others, and winne them to assent vnto what we would haue them,” Digby concludes, “what passion soeuer we exhibite in ourselues, the same stealeth insensibly vpon ththose we speake vnto.”⁹⁵ Digby is even echoing much of the language in his theories of corpuscularity (atomism) and sympathy from his discussion of the weapons salve/sympathetic cure-all from the former treatise. In his chapter on attraction between bodies, Digby explains how vapors or steam can carry the atoms of a salve to a wound, so long as the wound, as a source, shares the same elemental combinations (hot and moist) as the vapor:

But to make these operations of nature, not incredible; lett vs remember how we haue determined that euery body whatsoever, doth yield some

⁹⁵ Digby, *Two Treatises*, 381.

steame, or vent a kind of vapour from it selfe; and consider, how they must needes do so most of all, that are hoat and moyst, as blood and milke are, and as all woundes and sores generally are. We see that the foote of a hare or deere leaueth such an impression where the beast hath passed, as a dog can discerne it a long time after: and a foxe breatheth out so strong a vapour, that the hunters themselues can wind it a great way of, and a good while after he is parted from the place. Now ioyning this, to the experiences we haue already allowed of, concerning the attraction of heate; wee may conclude that if any of these vapours do light vpon a solide warme body, which hath the nature of a source vnto them, they will naturally congregate and incorporate there; and if those vapors be ioyned with any medicatiue quality or body, they will apply that medicament better then any surgeon can apply it. *Then, if the steame of blood and spirits, do carry with it from the weapon or cloth, the balsamike qualities of the salue or powder, and with them do settle vpon the wound; what can follow but a bettering in it?*⁹⁶

According to Digby's analogy, we communicate passions in the same way the weapons' salve communicates medicinal atoms. Such an analogy holds, because human emotions (the passions) are themselves physical, unlike thoughts. While this analogy would seem to level Digby's literary theory with natural philosophy by reducing rhetorical pathetic appeals to physical explanations, the analogy rather exalts Digby's natural philosophy to the level of literature.

To Digby, both science and literature share the same domain of the spiritual life. The soul is the origin not only of moral action but intellectual activities, too, such as philosophy, poetry and rhetoric, since both the principles of the intellect and the will belong to the soul. Thus, Socrates, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, describes rhetoric as "the art of soul-leading [*psychogogia*] by means of words."⁹⁷ Rhetoric, to Plato, is not an amoral end unto itself, as he accuses the Sophists of treating the art, but an instrument under the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 165.

⁹⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2005), 261a.

moral governance of philosophy. In fact, *Two Treatises* seems to be conscious of the *Phaedrus*, as the epigraph of *Two Treatises* comes from the *Phaedrus*, “*Animae naturam, absque totius natura, SuffICIENTER cognosci posse, existimas?*” (“Do you reckon the nature of the soul to be able to be understood sufficiently apart entirely from nature?”). Poetry and philosophy, to Digby, are both empirical arts; they cannot be “understood sufficiently apart entirely from nature.” Thus, just as literature can rouse the passions according to physical explanations, so too can literature lead—or mislead, as the case may be—the souls of an audience. As Digby argues, in an Augustinian fashion, poets must maintain a righteous *ethos* in order to create beautiful works of art:

If those who assume the title of Poets, did ayme at this end, and would hold themselves strictly to it, they would proue as profitable instruments as any the commonwealth had: for the delightfullnesse and blithenesse of their compositions, inuitheth most men to be frequently conuersant with them; (eyther in songs, or vpon the stage, or in other Poemes) whiles the sober aspect and seuerity of bare precepts, deturneth many from lending a pleased eare to their wholesome doctrine; and what men swallow with delight, is conuerteth into nourishment: so that, if their drift were to settle in mens mindes a due valuation of vertue, and a detestation of vice, no art would do it more vniuersally, nor more effectually: and by it, mens hartes would be sett on fire to the pursuite of the one, and be shrunke vp with dislike and horroure against the other. But vnto such a Poet as would ayme at those noble effects, no knowledge of Morality, nor of the nature and course of humane actions and accidents must be wanting: he must be well versed in History; he must be acquainted with the progresse of nature, in what she bringeth to passe; he must be deficient in no part of Logike, Rhetorike, or Grammar: in a word, he must be consummate in all artes and sciencies, if he will be excellent in his way.⁹⁸

Without “knowledge of Morality,” “History,” natural science and the trivium liberal arts and “wanting” in “the nature and course of humane actions and accidents,” poets cannot “frame specious [beautiful] Ideas, in which the people may see, what is well done, what

⁹⁸ Digby, *Loose Fantasies*, 382.

amisse, what should be done, and what by error is wont to be done: and to imprint in mens mindes a deepe conceite of the goods and euils, that follow their vertuous or vitious comportement in their lifes.”

Contrary to Digby’s own assertion that his theory of cognition is ultimately inconsequential to his theories of discourse and literature, Digby’s anxiety to commit to a single conception of cognition—whether one that privileges ideas, language or the external as the center of thought—implies that he is constantly revising his science to accommodate his literary theory. While scholars of Digby conventionally describe Digby’s worldview as a fusion of Aristotle, Paracelsus and Descartes, Digby’s *Two Treatises* seems to contain less of a synthetic eclecticism than a pluralistic eclecticism. He is trying to salvage competing values (truth, romance, practicality, etc.) in his science, an attempt which, in the 17th century in particular, leads to more one science.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The arbitrary expression of Digby's "romantic science" in Digby's *Loose Fantasies* and *Two Treatises* points to a development of thought in Digby that is not so much linear but branched out into a variety of interests. *Loose Fantasies* not only responds to contemporary philosophical discourses after all, such as Cartesianism and materialism, but also to generic considerations of the romance. In other words, Digby's philosophical and scientific discourses in *Loose Fantasies* do not just participate in contemporary scientific discussions of Digby's time but also participate as a mode in the very genre he is writing under—the narrative romance—in so far as the discourses are a courtly romantic drama of the mind. Likewise does *Two Treatises*, despite being classified as a philosophical work, also responding to literary generic considerations. The text shifts its epistemological frameworks in order to accommodate its literary theory. Digby's "romantic science," then, can just as accurately be described inversely as a "scientific romance," for the distinction between the two modes of science and romance was still being constructed in Digby's time.

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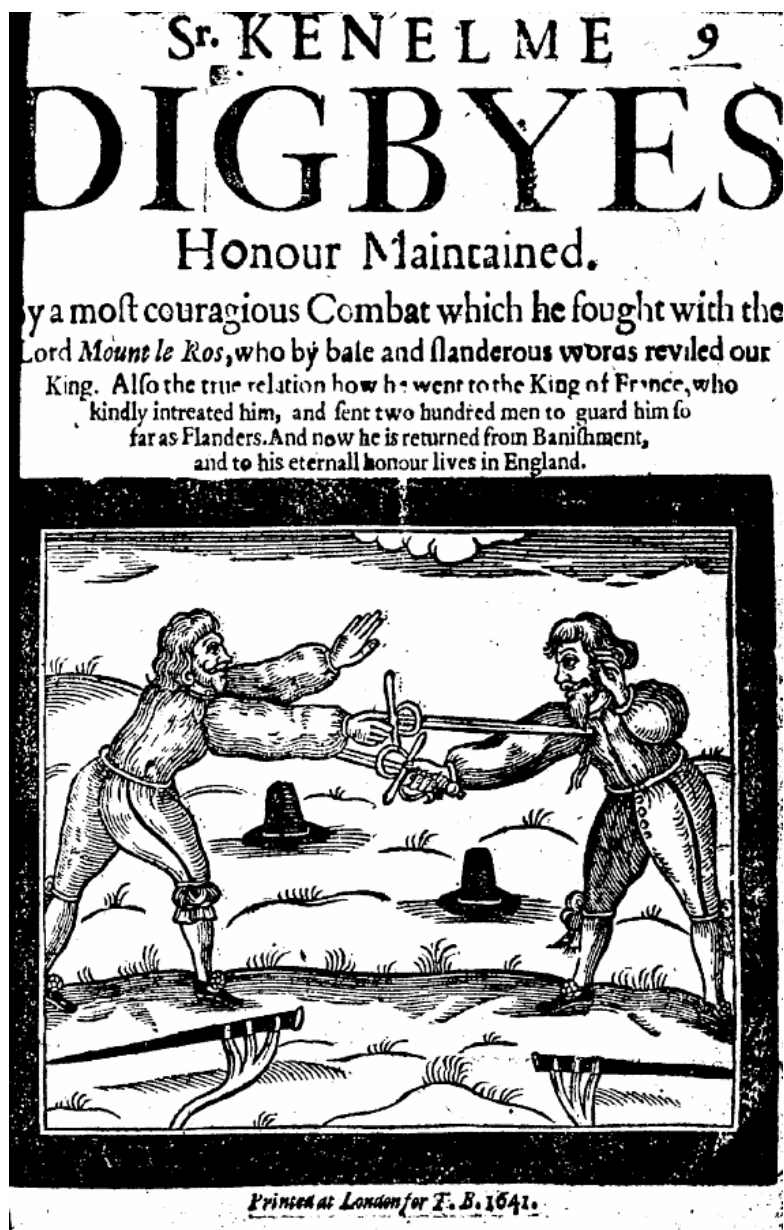
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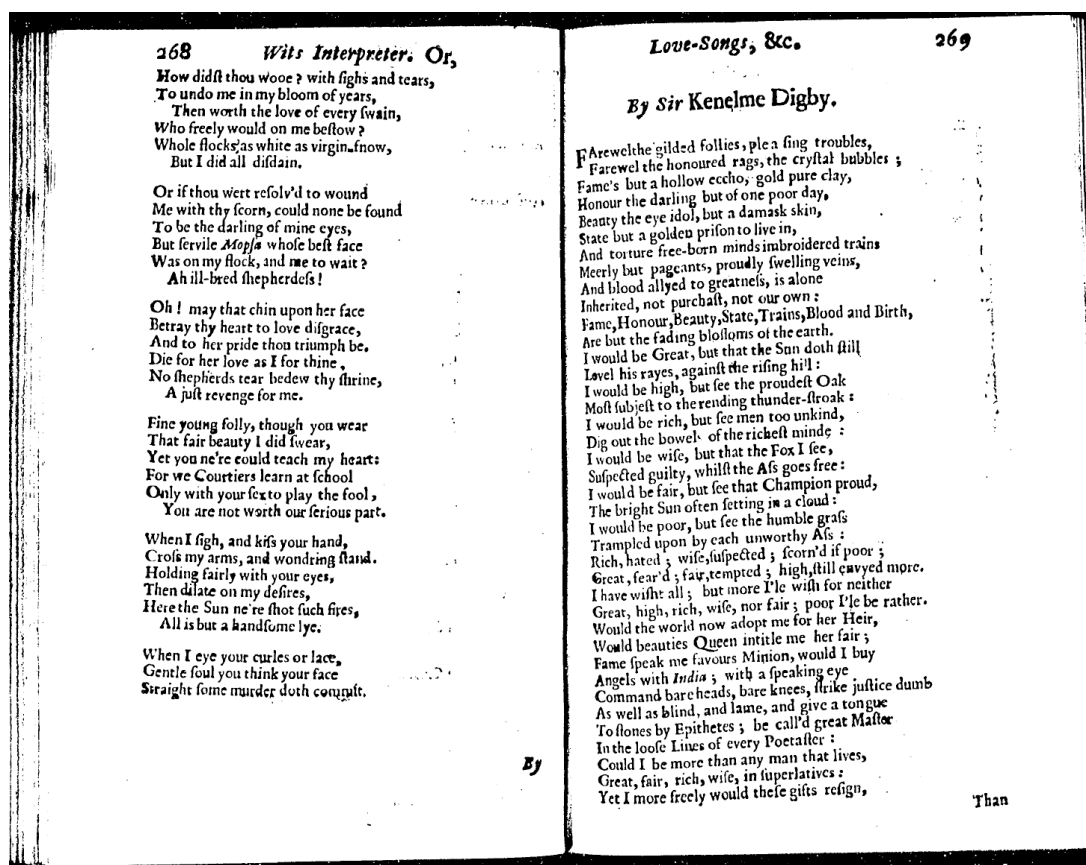
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APPENDIX A



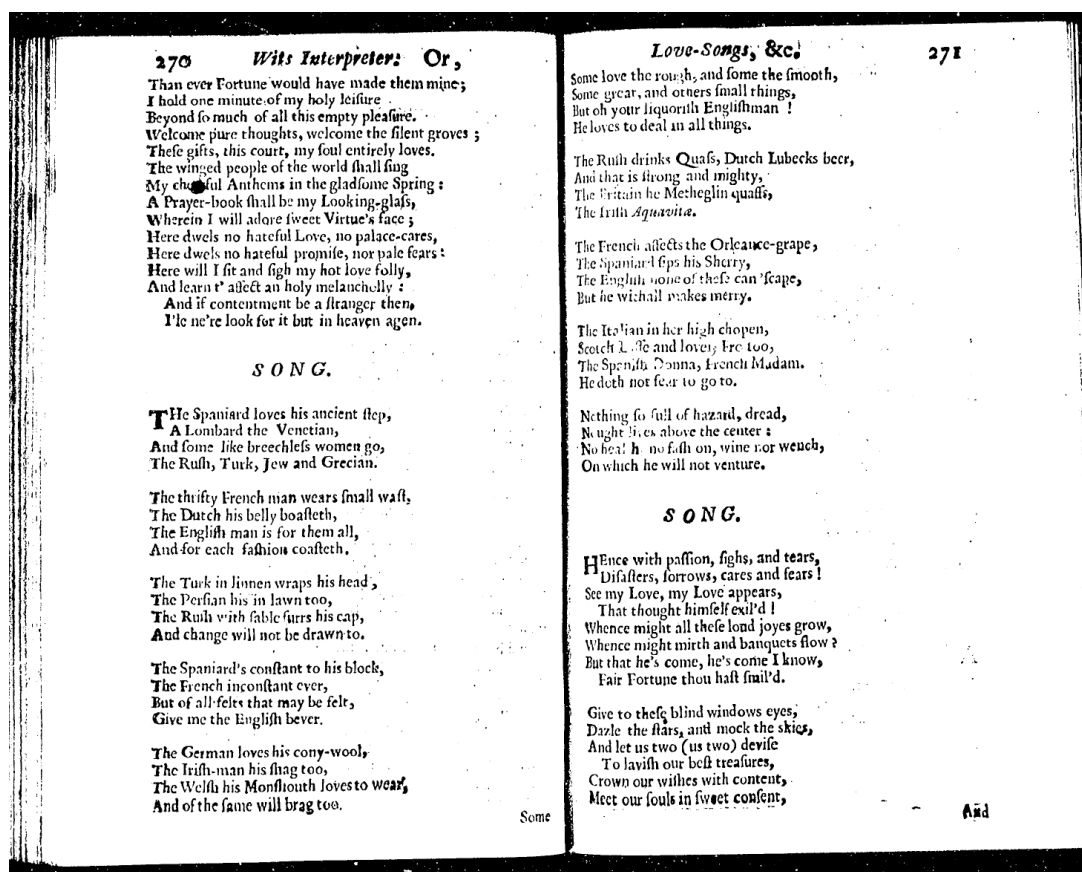
A1. Digby, Sir Kenelm. Title page to "Sir Kenelm Digby's Honor Maintained."

EEBO. 1641.



A2. Anonymous. "Valediction to the World." *Wit's Interpreter*. Ed. John Cotgrave.

EEBO. 1671.



A3. Anonymous. "Valediction to the World." *Wit's Interpreter*. Ed. John Cotgrave.

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VITA

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